



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve  
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## National Park Service News Release

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### **“Holiday in the National Parks” Celebrated at the White House Fort Caroline National Memorial and Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve Ornaments Displayed on the Official White House Christmas Tree**

*This release is also available online at <http://www.nps.gov/timu/parknews/index.html>*

(Jacksonville, Florida) – Two hand painted ornaments for Fort Caroline and the Timucuan Preserve are prominently displayed on this year’s official White House Christmas Tree. The tree is the centerpiece of elaborate decorations celebrating the theme of “Holiday in the National Parks.”

“It is an amazing honor for the National Park Service to be selected as the theme for the White House holiday decorations by the President and Mrs. Bush,” said National Park Service Director Mary A. Bomar. “Mrs. Bush is the best champion for our national parks, and the beautiful decorations in each state room showcase the natural and historical treasures found in parks throughout the country.”

The tree, located in the Blue Room, is adorned with handmade ornaments representing the country’s 391 National Park Service sites. “Each ornament on the magnificent 18-foot Fraser fir was designed by an artist selected by the park,” said Bomar. “The ornaments tell the stories of our parks, just as our parks tell the stories of our nation.”

The Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve features one of the last unspoiled coastal wetlands on the Atlantic Coast. Visitors can discover 6,000 years of human history and experience the beauty of salt marshes, coastal dunes, and hardwood hammocks. The park has three visitor centers emphasizing the varied natural and cultural history unique to the Jacksonville area.

Gayle Middlebrook designed and painted an ornament that features Fort Caroline National Memorial. She attended artists’ reception hosted by First Lady Laura Bush at the White House on November 28, 2007. Ms. Middlebrook is a former arts teacher who now works as an artist specializing in architectural renderings and portraits for builders of upscale homes. She also works in watercolors and photography. Ms. Middlebrook referred to her ornament project and the trip to the White House as a “once in a lifetime experience.” Her family is very active with Jacksonville area parks, and her

rendering of the historic Ribault Club hung in the Washington office of former National Park Service Director Fran Mainella.

Suzanne Pickett designed and painted an ornament to represent the Timucuan Preserve and Kingsley Plantation. She also attended the special artists' reception at the White House. The ornament features portraits of the buildings, crops, and the enslaved people who labored at the plantation. Her inspiration came from historical photographs and the natural environment. Suzanne Pickett, a Florida native, owns her own art firm. People and nature are her inspiration, and she carries that into her own unique art style. Ms. Pickett is president of the Jacksonville Consortium of African American Artists, whose goal is to foster an environment that encourages African American arts and artists to flourish and succeed in the business of art. She has also worked on several projects with the Preserve.

The holiday displays incorporate the wide variety of natural, cultural, and recreational features preserved by the National Park Service. Along with our local parks, models of icons such as the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and the Statue of Liberty share space with paintings of scenic vistas from Grand Canyon, Zion, and Rocky Mountain National Parks. Holiday garlands intertwined with park objects including seashells, pine cones, and gold aspen leaves add to each room's festive feel.

"National Parks commemorate the people, places, and events that define the American experience," said Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. "I am so appreciative of President Bush's efforts to recognize the important role of national parks in American society. Our country will celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016 and the President has been instrumental in establishing the National Park Centennial Initiative to prepare the parks for the next century."

Learn more about the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve by calling 904.641.7155 or visiting <http://www.nps.gov/timu> on the Internet.

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